

# We must eschew bitterness and competition and work to achieve our common goals as a Parliament

...Sen. Olujimi tells ECOWAS MPs

A member of the Nigerian Senate delegated to the ECOWAS Parliament, Sen. Biodun Olujimi has called on Parliamentarians of the Economic Community of West African States to set aside their different groupings that lead to unhealthy competition and suspicions currently bedeviling the Parliament. Speaking at the sidelines of the ECOWAS Parliament's Parliamentary Seminar which focused on the Application of the Supplementary Act on The Enhancement of the Powers of the Parliament in Light of the Restructuring of The ECOWAS Commission, Sen. Olujimi stated that the effect of the suspicious nature of MPs is grossly affecting the progress of the Parliament as well as its core mandate. "There is only one thing that I find that we have not spoken about in this seminar, and it is good that we are all here today, it might be offensive to



some but one thing is inherently problematic among us. "As Parliamentarians, we are mutually suspicious of each other, the various countries are suspicious of each other and there is this competition amongst us, and except we do away with them and work as a team, and whatever we have said in this seminar no matter how beautiful will not give us the

result that we desire.

"One thing is sure, there are various groupings within this Parliament, it must not continue, we must be able to listen to each other and to understand where every other person is coming from and be able to find a middle cause in all that we are doing with an open mind so that we can all benefit from the problems and the successes of each other. That is keen to what we have discussed in this seminar and that is what will lead us to the success that we are looking out for" she said. The Nigerian Lawmaker, however, appealed to the MPs to make deliberate efforts in working together with one voice and mind.

"What is important for us is to have a focus, for us to be able to cast what we have done in concrete and to be able to channel our words on work. Everybody is against everybody, for us to achieve results, we must learn from each other, we must benefit from each other and we must not note each other's mistakes any longer", Olujimi said.

## Sen. Adeyemi charges National Parliaments to ensure compliance with ECOWAS Resolutions

A Nigerian Legislator, Sen. Smart Adeyemi has called on Lawmakers from the Fifteen Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to ensure that resolutions adopted at the Parliament sessions are implemented meticulously in their National Parliament. He made the call while speaking to journalists at the venue of the Parliamentary Seminar in Lome, Togo, with the theme: Application of the Supplementary Act on The

Enhancement of the Powers of the Parliament in Light of the Restructuring of The ECOWAS Commission. Sen. Adeyemi observed that over time, most resolutions adopted by the Parliament are yet to be implemented by the member state, hence the Impact of the Parliament is not felt across the region, nor does it contribute to the advancement of the Parliament.

"I do know that as a serving senator, there are International conventions which must be domicile in respective states and Nations before they can be taken as Laws, in essence, most of the international resolutions that Nigeria is a signatory to was first brought to the floor of the Senate, and the House of Representatives, but in the case of the ECOWAS Parliament, Resolutions have not been anyway presented before the National Assembly in any form, so it amounts to a waste of resources and a waste of time. If we pass resolutions and it is just communicated to the Member States without any form of enforcing mechanism in place, I think there is something that is missing. "This Parliamentary seminar has been able to address salient things in the formation and structure of the ECOWAS Parliament itself, it has explained the need for us to put in the mechanism towards ensuring that resolutions are implemented and a situation where resolutions are reached and they are not implemented will amount to waste of time and waste of resources," He said.

He further urged fellow MP's to ensure that resolutions that are adopted by Parliament are implemented by their various National Assembly as well as encouraged the Parliament to come up with a monitoring mechanism.

## Expert urges Parliament to Democratize Regional Integration Through Stakeholders Engagement

In the bid to achieve a Regional Integrated Community in the ECOWAS Region, a Policy Strategist and Consultant on Parliamentary matters, Prince Kanayo Nwajei has urged the ECOWAS Parliament to democratize Regional Integration by engaging stakeholders across the Region bearing in mind the Supplementary Acts Article 4 (a, b, c & g) which empowers the Parliament to Strengthen representative democracy in the Community.

Addressing Parliamentarians at the ongoing Parliamentary seminar on the Application of the Supplementary Act on the Enhancement of the Powers of the Parliament in light of the restructuring of the ECOWAS Commission, Prince Kanayo noted that the Economic Community of West African States, like the European Parliament, is a supranational regional organization that evolved through related circumstances and similar processes. While some progress has been recorded in the democratic march and regional integration agenda across the world, some regions have been bogged down by democratic disruptions.

He said “In the West African context, the increasing need for a paradigm shift is instructive; and it requires the urgency of parliamentary intervention through robust and effective advocacy (in line with Article 4 of the Supplementary Act). The Parliament has a major role to play in strengthening the ECOWAS power bloc through the promotion of borderless regional integration.

“As a Parliament, part of the strategies for deepening integration should be to encourage comparative advantage among the Member-States that can leverage critical engagements and reinforcement of arguments that point to the huge market of 402 million population making the region a

*Continuing he added that In all the challenges across the sub-region, one thing is clear: Crises of any sort can be averted or resolved with strategic and sustained dialogue; “In the light of the foregoing, we respectfully submit that ECOWAS Parliament can carry out its political and integration mandate more effectively by moving from, preserving to appraising and applying new thinking through stakeholders engagement, as it is indeed a method that has been tested and tried by public institutions elsewhere, and with success stories;*

common investment destination”. He said.

“Articles 8,11 (2) of the Supplementary Act refer to “Mandatory Assent”, “Mandatory Referral”, while Article 15 is on the power of Resolution which specifically empowers Parliament with the authority and official exercise of influence and authority over others: the environment, society, community institutions, and citizens. This confers on Parliament the ability to produce an effect within a jurisdiction;

“The big question is: How have these powers been used in actualizing Parliamentary mandate as spelled out in Article 4 (a, b, c and g) of the Supplementary Act? It is important to establish that Parliament's fulfillment of its responsibilities under the Supplementary Act and their

application of the Rules of Procedure have tremendous implications and consequences for the Community's attainment of the goal of regional integration;

“A stakeholder engagement strategy identifies the needs of key groups and the sponsor plays a vital role in ensuring those basic needs are met. The purposes of Stakeholder engagement include: Education, Accountability, Building Trust and Confidence, and Risk Management;

“In the process of engaging the stakeholders, regional citizens are consulted, they are involved to take ownership; it is relatively easy for them to comply. With a good stakeholder strategy, seamless, effective communication is maintained. In other words, it helps decisions taken by Parliament to be easily appreciated and implemented, because the engagement has mobilized the stakeholders because mobilization is part of the process of stakeholder engagement; Kanayo said.

Continuing he added that In all the challenges across the sub-region, one thing is clear: Crises of any sort can be averted or resolved with strategic and sustained dialogue; “In the light of the foregoing, we respectfully submit that ECOWAS Parliament can carry out its political and integration mandate more effectively by moving from, preserving to appraising and applying new thinking through stakeholders engagement, as it is indeed a method that has been tested and tried by public institutions elsewhere, and with success stories;

“In pursuit of regional solidarity and progress, there is no tools or democratic institution better suited and designed to guarantee and ensure democratic inclusiveness and stability and this strategy”, Kanayo Concluded.

## **Mps flays illegal recruitment at the ECOWAS Parliament, Committee Chairman threatens resignation**

The Ad-hoc committee set up to investigate the allegations of malpractice and unfair candidacy in the recruitment process of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Parliament has once again expressed its infuriation in the process and arising issues in the Parliament.

Recall that the issue was brought to the floor of the Parliament's First Ordinary Session that was held in Abuja in June 2022, which led to the establishment of an Ad-hoc committee saddled with the responsibility of investigating allegations of malpractice in the ongoing recruitment process at the ECOWAS Parliament with these terms of Reference; To "Investigate allegations of inappropriate conduct in the ongoing recruitment process at the ECOWAS Parliament; "Investigate allegations of marginalization of Nigerian Candidates in the current recruitment process; "Investigate and determine if indeed the plenary adopted any Resolution concerning the subject matter (Recruitment of Staff), using normal parliamentary procedure; "In the execution of its mandate, the Committee shall be granted access to all documents relating to the recruitment exercise and work with the Advisory Committee on Recruitment and Promotions at the ECOWAS Parliament, to under-study and review the exercise. The Ad-hoc Committee would be guided by the provisions of the Supplementary Act and the ECOWAS Staff Regulations. "The work of the Ad-Hoc Committee was expected to commence on 22nd August 2022 and its findings are expected to be reported to the Honorable Speaker in one week, following which a Bureau meeting will be convened to consider the report for onward submission to the Plenary. Speaking on the issues, Nigerian Senator Ali Ndume, Chairman of the Ad-hoc Committee, has however disclosed that despite the halt in the recruitment process pending the recommendation of the Committee, some new staff has just been recruited to the Parliament. Similarly, Hon. Awaji-

Inombek Abiante (Nigeria), also lamented that the Leadership of the Parliament has a lot to do, he said.

"A Parliament that donates her responsibilities and powers to others can never be classified as a true Parliament, and this is an example of what happens to a Parliament that has to donate all her powers outside, they tend to use all opportunities that they have for their brothers and their sisters, A classical example, Parliament resolved that everything that has to do with recruitment should be suspended until Audit has been looked at, people went aside and they were having an interview for people they do, and somebody was telling me that was not an adopted resolution, the man who is supposed to guide Parliament is saying it is not an adopted resolution, what type of Parliament does that, we have a self-inflicted in this Parliament" Abiante lamented. Hon. Jonathan Kaipay of Liberia while aligning to this concern also wailed "It is surprising that you as Speaker will put a freeze to an employment process and people are being employed, I think we need to look at things again" he said. Continuing, the Committee Chairman said "Mr. Speaker how can I be a committee my report is yet to be presented to the house, Investigations were still ongoing, what we were fighting against and still preparing a report, I received a memo a few days ago that some people were employed. "This is an abuse and a gross disrespect to the committee and me as a person, the clerk of the committee is here, he can also attest to that. Mr. Speaker, I wish to state that with what has happened I can no longer continue as the chairman of the committee but to tender my resignation now, we cannot be working on something while it is already being implemented, this is a slap on my face as a ranking Lawmaker. However, my committee will present our reports, findings, and recommendation to the Parliament during the Extra-Ordinary Session" Ndume said.



## ECOWAS Parliament pushes for stiffer measures to tackle corruption

The Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, has called for stiffer measures in tackling corruption in the region. The Speaker of the Community Parliament Sidie Tunis made the call at the opening of Parliament's High-level Seminar in Lome, Togo with the theme "Application of the power of the Parliament in light of the restructuring of the ECOWAS Commission". Dr Tunis tasked governments of Member States with decisive steps to tackle corruption which has been undermining the economic growth of the region. He urged the Parliamentarians to enhance their commitment and understanding of their institutional roles and responsibilities.

The High-level Parliamentary Seminar seeks to explore and discuss the parliament's approach to the new administrative restructuring of the ECOWAS Commission.

This is in line with Article 27 (2) of the supplementary Act relating to the enhancement of powers of the ECOWAS Parliament's mandate.

Dr Tunis said that *"In endeavouring to boost our understanding of the institutional role and powers granted to us by the Supplementary Act.*

*"It is very important that we remain sensitive to the challenges confronting our achievements in regional integration, especially those brought upon us by the global economic crisis and internal conflicts.*

*"These include economic hardship and increase in the cost of living, climate change, which is affecting our countries in many ways, and accountability in our governance system. All these require our attention."*

*"Furthermore, as we strive to rebuild our economies in the wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic, we must also take very decisive steps at fighting corruption.*

*"Corruption continues to undermine our development and slow down economic growth in the ECOWAS Member States. The Time for accelerated action is now,"* Tunis said.

He said; *"As we meet, the gains we have painstakingly made as a region are being threatened. "Threats to democracy and the rule of law, combating corruption,*

*the realisation of the African Free Trade Area, eradicating poverty, promoting human rights, and advocating for gender equality, loom across the region."*

Tunis said that as the sub-region confronts these daunting challenges, it would require innovative strategies that ensure each Community Institution performs its role in line with the competencies conferred upon it. He said that in doing so, the ECOWAS Parliament, which reflects the full representation of the peoples of all 15 ECOWAS Member States, is the ideal platform to share experiences about workable ways by which solutions can be found.



*"It is expected that this seminar will increase the understanding of Members of Parliament of the extent of their enhanced powers and take full ownership of them "It is also expected that Members will be informed about the institutional reforms currently ongoing in the ECOWAS System, particularly at the ECOWAS Commission, and how it directly affects their work. "I also expect that this Seminar will move this Parliament to seek greater competencies, one that allows the Parliament to play its full role in the discharge of its political and diplomatic duties. "I wish to remind each of us that our Parliament remains envy across the African Continent*

*and as such, Africa and the region look up to us for leadership, as well as political and economic development,"* he explained.

Tunis said; *"We must ensure that we live up to those expectations and take ownership of the peace, security, and governance of our region.*

*"We must continue to strengthen our engagements and work for hand in hand for the good of the people we serve, by so doing, we would have left behind a legacy that will be cherished for generations to come."*

He also tasked Member states on early warning preparedness ahead of national elections to mitigate likely election challenges as Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia prepare for their national elections.

# Learn from CAPE VERDE, invest in Education

## ... MP Advises Nigeria

**A** Member representing Andoni/Opobo/Nkoro Federal Constituency of Rivers State Honourable Awaji – Inombek Abiante has called on Nigeria to emulate the example of Cape Verde by investing in education to curb the spate of religious intolerance in the country. He was speaking on the sidelines of the ECOWAS Parliament Committees on Education, Science and Culture/ Health/ Telecommunication and Information Technology, in Praia, Capital of Cape Verde, which focused on theme: Religious Tolerance and Harmony; Essential factors to Development, Peace and stability in ECOWAS Region”. 93% of the Cape Verdean population are educated, a development the authorities attribute to one of the major factors responsible for religious tolerance in the country. Situating Nigeria with Cape Verde, Abiante postulated that the high number of out of school children in Nigeria, may not be far from the reason for the high rate of religious intolerance in the country. He therefore appealed to the government at all levels to make deliberate efforts in ensuring that education plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of the country.

“Some very obvious factors have been identified as the cause or drivers of religious intolerance in the region and basically, we have looked at education as a fulcrum towards reducing the challenge. So if you situate that to the Nigerian experience, it is one record that we have one of the highest out of school population and if that is correct, then we don't need to go very far to understand why we have the challenge of religious intolerance. So what we need to do is to put together all the resources that will enable us to migrate away from being tagged as one of the countries with the highest number of out of school children. You have heard Cape Verde saying 93% of their people are educated, so if we achieve education for our people, understanding will improve and that will also propel tolerance”.

The lawmaker questioned the claim of Nigeria being a secular state when such was not applicable in practice. Again, he emphasized that such a situation could be corrected with education. “Luckily for us we have also declared that Nigeria is a secular state, but how secular in practice is what we should be pushing for? We need to look at the perimeters and see if it guarantees secularity in practice because you cannot contradict yourself. If you say the country is a secular state, while some States within that same country have laws that declare one religion superior to the other which has led to isolating some culture, isolating some practices, isolating some beliefs to the extent that certain things are considered taboo. So a lot need to be done and you cannot achieve it by force, you cannot achieve it by fate, you can only achieve that by superior argument and the superior argument can only come when you are enlightened, when you are educated.”

On the allegation that politicians who are supposedly enlightened, are the key drivers of religious intolerance, Abiante argued further that the solution still lies in educating the masses. “Human nature itself seeks to take advantage of any situation. The enlightened mind may have seen the unenlightened and seeks to take advantage of him and manipulate him to sooth that purpose but if the category of the enlightened are much more than the unenlightened, whether you call it politicians, enlightened, educated or whatever, cannot manipulate with ease the person he seeks to take advantage of. So education still is the key. Education does not mean educating a very tiny minority. It means educating the state, it means educating the people, educating the quantum that is required to propelled the desired understanding. So if a greater number of the citizens are enlightened, it will be very difficult to be manipulated”.

Some schools of thought have advocated for the domestication of laws as a measure to reduce the incidence of religious intolerance but the law maker was not at home with that position. According to him, “it is not about law and declaration. It is not about domestication. For instance, we have so declared that we are a secular state. What secularity means is that no religion is superior to

the other. Everybody has the same or equivalent latitude to practice his or her belief but how is it being implemented becomes the question. There is even a contradiction in our own case where some states have enacted laws to promote certain religions, so it is not about laws. It is about the practice of the people. It is about conviction, it is about positive expression of what is right, positive expression of the capacity to tolerate the capacity to accommodate, that is exactly what is required in this circumstance”.

On why the Muslim-Muslim ticket adopted by the ruling party for next year's Presidential election has generated so much dust, compare to 1993 when Abiola and kingibe ran on the same religion platform, he said the dynamics of the country were different today. “If you get to the narrative of today, do we have the same level of trust? There is so much discontent, so much misunderstanding, so much finger pointing. Everybody wants to protect its own enclave, that is why you find all the challenges. If we have been very accommodating, maybe...Maybe not... So for today, it has been raised as an issue and it has remained an issue in the perspective of today's Nigeria”.

Honourable Awaji – Inombek Abiante spoke on his take home lessons on the joint Committee meeting: “on the lessons of Cape Verde, essentially, the major statistics of the country that is very admirable, very intriguing, very inviting, is the fact that 93% of its population are educated, if that is the only lesson that I have taken home, that is enough. So it should propel me within my consistency to seek solution through education, get as much as possible , government 's attention , that is the attention of those who will execute the project; the attention to provide more schools, more classrooms, more infrastructure , more incentives to ensure and guarantee that people are in the classrooms, that people are educated and it is not just education for the sake of education, but education for the purpose of getting engaged because it is also dangerous to have people parading paper qualification without adding value to themselves and to the society. And one of the surest ways of achieving this, as far as I am concern, lies in getting back our technical and vocational education. We have lost it. In the seventies and early eighties when I went to school, we had vocational colleges, we had technical colleges. I still have people whose only education ended at the vocational colleges and till tomorrow they are equipped with the craft that they have used in training their children to the level they are training them today. How did we lose all of that? We have drafted policies, the 6-3-3-4 system, we bought machines, we bought equipment to several schools, where are the equipment? We just keep wasting resources. Probably, I think one of the challenges we have as a country is excess resources. When you have something in excess, it also has its negative implication. let me tell you, as a young lady, you open your wardrobe, you have 200 different clothes. At first, you will be confused which one to wear to church on a Sunday, you can keep searching for the cloth that will best suit you till you run late. But if you see a lady who has only one or two clothes, and is determined to go to church, she will wash it overnight and before morning, it is already dry and she may be the first person to appear in church. So, I think one of the problems we have in Nigeria is that God has blessed us excessively that we have become confused, we don't even know how to utilize the resources to our benefit. Maye if God takes the resources away, we might begin to think and we will think properly”.